

Internet Addiction Caught in the Web

Surfing the Internet is convenient, fast, and efficient when you're looking for information. The possibilities seem endless, but the time you spend on the Internet can also become unlimited and eventually addictive. This is also called Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD).

Take the following quiz to find out if your use of the Internet is interfering with your social or occupational functioning. "Yes" answers indicate a need to seek an assessment for the possibility of IAD.

- Do you go on the Internet for one purpose and end up spending far more time than you'd planned?
- Does your family complain of not seeing you enough because of Internet use?
- Are Internet friendships more important to you than other friendships?
- Have you tried limiting your Internet use, only to fail at doing so?
- Do you use the Internet as a form of escape—to avoid responsibilities or a problem in your life?

High Stakes of IAD

Those suffering from IAD encounter family, legal, financial, and work problems. When you are bored, you risk plopping down in front of the computer rather than participating in healthier activities. Plus, you run the risk developing online relationships that can threaten the stability of your home life.

Occupational Hazards

Employees surfing the Web is the leading cause of lost work time according to a 2007 survey by www.salary.com. And for employees with sexual addiction patterns, uncontrollable visits to pornographic Web sites can lead to your loss of a job, legal entanglements or even arrest. You cannot count on "Wipe It Clean" programs to erase your history of Internet use, no matter what the slick advertising says.

First Steps, Then Seek Help

- Have you thought, "Should I cut back on my Internet use?" Seriously asking yourself this question indicates that you may likely suffer with IAD. Nevertheless, give it a try.
- Ask yourself, "Is my use of the Internet a substitute for resolving some personal problem in my life like a marital problem or job boredom? Am I depressed? Do I feel anxious if I stay offline?"
- Try tapering off and setting limits. "I will spend only 10 hours a week online." Gauge your success. Count the hours and the minutes and then reduce it.
- Disrupt your routine. If you mostly use the Internet on weekends, shift to only going online during the week. Is your computer in a quiet room in the basement? Move it to another room where you will not be isolated. Does this help change your use pattern?
- Create an alternate activity. Make a conscious decision to involve yourself and others in an activity that you enjoy. See if it interrupts your IAD pattern.



Internet Addiction Behaviors

Increased Tolerance – As time passes, you need more and more time on the Internet to maintain your initial level of excitement.

Withdrawal Symptoms – If you attempt to limit your time on the Internet, you become anxious or irritated. You may obsess and wonder what's happening on the Internet, fantasize, or dream about it. To counter these symptoms, you go online for relief.

Internet Expert – The Internet replaces your hobbies. Where you once studied golf, woodworking, gardening, or fishing—browsers, speakers, or computer software has become an obsession.

Social Isolation – Less involvement with family, job, or friends in order to use the computer.

Risk of Loss – Time on the Internet causes loss of a relationship, educational plans, or career goals.

Financial Losses

Shopping can be dangerous on the Internet if you've had compulsive shopping problems in your life. Gambling sites are especially risky. Compulsive gambling is a devastating illness and it is only a click away from your retirement or children's education funds. These are often tapped by gambling addicts to pay gambling debts.

What the EAP Can Do

If you struggled with the five tips above, the EAP can help assess the extent of your addiction to the Internet and determine what steps you can take to stop it. The EAP will help you get to the right source of help. **Call the EAP at (504) 832-1170 or (800) 256-1575.**

This information is not intended to replace the medical advice of your doctor or health care provider. Please consult your health care provider or EAP for advice about a personal concern or medical condition.